

Fall 8-15-2010

ENG 2011G-003: Literature, the Self, and the World: Poetry

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Recommended Citation

Moffitt, Letitia, "ENG 2011G-003: Literature, the Self, and the World: Poetry" (2010). *Fall 2010*. 70.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2010/70

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2011G-003

SYLLABUS
English 2011, Section 003, Fall 2010
Literature, the Self, and the World: Poetry
MW 3:00–4:15pm, Coleman 3170, EIU

Professor: Dr. Letitia L. Moffitt
Office: Coleman Hall room 3861 (south corridor)
Office Hours: Mon. 10-11am, 4:15-5:15pm; Wed, 2-3pm, 4:15-5:15pm (or by appointment)
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(for questions only; do not e-mail assignments without my permission)

Objectives

This course is divided into four units reflecting four basic kinds of questions that a lot of people have about poetry: What is it, who writes it, how do we read it, and why do we read it? As such, you will read and discuss a wide range of poetry, and you will engage in a number of activities with the goal of exploring and understanding many possible answers to these questions.

Texts

Vendler, Helen. *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An introduction and anthology*.
Other poems will be assigned outside of this anthology; I will provide copies.

Assignments

Paper 1	Due Mon., Sept. 13	10%
Paper 2	Due Wed., Oct. 13	10%
Paper 3	Due Mon., Nov. 8	15%
Paper 4	Due Mon., Nov. 29	10%
Response journal	Due Wed., Dec. 8	15%
Group presentation	Mon., Oct 4 & Wed., Oct. 6	15%
Poetry Fair display	Mon., Dec. 6	15%
Final exam	Thurs., Dec. 16	10%

Papers

You will write four short papers (anywhere from one to three pages, as will be specified) for this course, each of them with very different and specific requirements. I will provide detailed descriptions of each as the term progresses; meanwhile be sure to pay attention to “Important notes on written work” on the following page.

Response journal

Whenever we discuss a film or a set of poems in class, you will be required to write a brief response (about a page) to the poems and the class discussion of them. I will provide general guidelines each class time as to what your response should focus on. Keep all of your responses together in a “journal” (a two-pocket folder is fine). The journal will be due at the end of the semester. Be sure to pay attention to “Important notes on written work” on the following page.

Important notes on written work

Format: All written work (both papers and response journal) must be typed and printed from a word processor (NO handwritten work accepted!) in readable font (12 pt. Times New Roman or equivalent), normal margins (around 1" top and bottom, around 1.25" left and right), double-spaced, your name on each page, all pages numbered and fastened together with a staple (don't do that corner-fold-over thing and expect the pages to stay together). Don't get cute with margins or font size in order to stretch out a thin paper (and yet don't "pad" a paper with repetition and fluff). If you run out of things to say well before reaching the page minimum, you need to do a lot more than just fill up the empty space; you probably need to go back and put more thought into your paper as a whole.

All typed work also must be neat, readable, and free of hand-written corrections or blobs of correction fluid. It is important that you proofread your work thoroughly *before* you print the final version that you hand in. What this means is that you need to give yourself enough time to look for and correct any typing, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors, rather than dashing off the paper at the last minute. If you have a brilliant paper that is unreadable because of these kinds of minor errors, no one will ever realize its brilliance.

Deadlines: Written assignments are due at the *beginning* of class on the due date. If your assignment is late by one day (that is, if you turn it in during the middle or end of the due date's class, after class, or at the beginning of the following class), its grade will go down one *full* grade level (that is, from A to B, etc.). If you don't hand in your paper at the beginning of the class following the due date, I won't accept it and your grade for that paper will be F. Do not e-mail me papers without my permission, or put them in my mailbox or slide them under my office door or leave them in the classroom if I'm not there, because I might not get them this way unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. I can't grade a paper that you honestly tried to get to me but somehow got lost; I can only grade what actually exists, *in my hands*, by the deadline.

Grading: All written work will be graded based on the following rubric:

A range = well-crafted paper that clearly shows that the student did the reading and put some thought into the assignment.

B range = writing that suggests that the student made a solid effort to fulfill the assignment in terms of both reading and writing, though perhaps more time and attention would have yielded an even more polished, thoughtful assignment.

C range = writing that suggests that the student made an effort to fulfill the assignment in terms of both reading and writing, but didn't exactly go out of the way to understand the reading or craft a solid response.

D range = writing that shows the student turned in *something* (though it isn't especially well crafted) and did *some* of the reading (though clearly not all).

F = no assignment turned in or a clearly inappropriate, pointless, poorly written assignment.

If you didn't do the reading, or you're writing this at the last minute, don't bother. You won't get credit and you'll be wasting your time, my time, printer ink and trees.

Keep track of your own marks as the semester goes on—it isn't hard. Do not expect me to simply know off the top of your head what your grade is.

Important note: I accept *no excuses* for late work, and I grant no excused extensions—not even for "good" excuses (sick/doctor's appointment/job interview/wedding/funeral). I am especially

not interested in technological glitches (printer not working/computer not working/document lost to cyberspace). You have the class schedule in your hands right now, so you know when the papers are due. If you must miss a due date's class, for whatever reason, get a friend to hand in your paper or make other arrangements with me.

Remember, it is not my responsibility to get your work from you; it is your responsibility to get it to me. It's *your* work, not mine, and you are the one being graded on it; therefore, it is in *your* best interest to figure out how to make the deadline. I don't make say all of this to be mean, but simply because we are on a tight schedule and it is crucial that you don't fall behind. If you do, you may never catch up again! Besides, handing the paper in is the easy part; writing it is the hard part. Don't ace the hard part only to blow the easy part.

Group presentation

The class will be divided into groups of around four students per group, and each group will choose a poet from a predetermined list. The group will research that poet's biography as well as some of his/her poems and put on a 20-minute presentation teaching the class about that poet's life and how it connects to his/her poetry, as well as giving providing some writing exercises or other activities related to the assignment. Details forthcoming as we get closer to the presentation dates.

Poetry Fair display

At the end of regular classes, we will have a "Poetry Fair." No, it won't be as dumb as it sounds—in fact, it should be quite fun and will allow you to choose your own poem to propose as worthy of being taught in a poetry class, as well as allowing you to use your creative juices in presenting this poem in an engaging way. Details forthcoming as we get closer to the end of the term.

Final exam

The final exam will cover basics about all of the poems assigned within the poetry sets (in other words, it will not cover any poems that students choose themselves for group presentations, papers, or the Poetry Fair). Details forthcoming as we get closer to the end of the term.

A rather lengthy note on attendance

You may have noted that there is no "attendance grade." This isn't high school; you don't get "credit" in college just for showing up and having a pulse. As such, I won't "call attendance" or have a "sign-in sheet." Before you get excited and figure on having your afternoons free all semester, read on.

First off, perhaps another instructor has already said this to you, but if not, let me be the first: nothing enrages a professor more than a student asking one of the following questions: "I was absent last time; what did I miss?" or, far worse, "Did I miss anything important?" You may not find the contents of a particular class particularly interesting or useful, but trust me: instructors hate wasting time just as much as you do (after all, it's *our* time too, you know). I wouldn't plan anything in a course that I thought was unimportant. Every day we will do something that "counts," and a lot of it can't easily be made up (such as your response journal entries). It's *all* important.

Second, every semester students come up to me and announce, “I was absent Wednesday!” or “I’m going to have to miss class Monday!” Then they stand there looking at me. I’ve been teaching for a while now, but I still have no idea what students are thinking when they do this. Am I supposed to applaud, or break into tears, or gasp in shock and horror? The next thing I get is a lengthy description of why they were or will be absent. Still this leaves me puzzled.

There seems to be a bit of a “disconnect” here: these students think the most important thing about absences is making sure the instructor knows the reason why they were absent. They seem to think that getting “excused” for absences is the primary goal. The truth is instructors often couldn’t care less about this—nor should you. If you miss a doctor’s appointment, do you give your doctor a lengthy explanation of why you missed it, because you’re afraid the doctor will dislike you and give you a “bad grade” on your checkup if you don’t have a good reason? Of course not; you reschedule the appointment.

The problem is, of course, that you can’t simply “reschedule” a day of class that you missed unless you have a time machine. And this is precisely what concerns instructors: not whether you have a “good reason” for missing class, but the fact that you are now behind everyone else in class. That is also what should concern *you*, the student. This should go without saying, but I’ll say it anyway: grades are not based on how I feel about you. Grades are based on the work you do toward a class’s objectives. If you miss class, you’ve missed work toward those objectives, and it doesn’t matter why you missed class—it’s exactly the same if you were at a funeral or at the movies. Moreover, you standing there trying very hard to make sure I know you had a good reason for missing class does absolutely *nothing* toward you actually gaining what you missed in class. It’s just wasting time.

Therefore, whenever you are absent, instead of doing the “I was/will be absent!” announcement and then launching into a description of why, first consider the following questions:

- What day(s) were you absent or will you be absent?
- Check the schedule: what does it say you missed or will miss on the day(s) you are absent?
- Based on this, what will you do about any assignments that are/were due? For example, if you know you’ll be absent on the day a paper is due, check the syllabus: you’ll see that I don’t give extensions; therefore, in this case you will need to get a friend to hand in your paper for you or make other arrangements.
- Based on the syllabus, what other missed activities can you make up? How do you propose to make up this work, if that is possible? Think of a specific plan, noting what times and days you can make my office hours and how specifically you intend to make up the work. Note that your plan must schedule all make-up work within a reasonable time frame—to be specific, within one class period of the last day of absence, as any longer would constitute an extension (and you know my policy on that).
- What work *cannot* be made up—for example, because it involves in-class activities that cannot be reproduced, or because I don’t give make-ups for that particular activity? (Read the syllabus carefully to see what work cannot be made up. Moreover, the laws of physics apply to me the same way they do everyone else: I cannot compress a 50-minute class into 20 words or fewer in answer to an off-the-cuff “what did I miss?”)

These questions should give you an understanding of how much work you’ve missed because of a given absence. Use common sense, as always.

Why am I going on and on about this? My point is not that you should slavishly drag yourself to class with a fever of 104. It is natural to expect that events may force you to miss class. My point is simply this: attend as many classes as you humanly can; if you miss class, for whatever reason, make sure you do what you need to do to keep up with the work, and expect there to be consequences that range from negligible (if absences are isolated incidents) to severe (if you make a habit of it).

Most of all, it is up to *you* to figure out what to do about your absences, not me. Do not expect me to propose solutions as to how you can get your assignments done. You're the one taking the class, so you need to do the work, and you should be keeping track of your work throughout the semester so you'll know if you've stayed on top of things. People who understand this tend to do well in college. People who don't...don't. (And if you do miss lots of classes throughout the term, please don't bother coming to me on Week 14 and asking how you can make it up. You should know the answer to that already: build a time machine. That's the only acceptable solution.)

Keep this in mind as well: attendance means substantially more than having a pulse, and the point of coming to class isn't just to "get credit" for being there. If you show up to class but then fall asleep, send text messages, work on assignments for other courses, etc., you might as well have stayed home, because you aren't really "attending." (Look it up in Webster's: the first definition for "attend" is "to pay attention," not "to be present.")

Plagiarism warning

Plagiarism means word-for-word unacknowledged copying of another writer's work *or* unacknowledged paraphrasing of another writer's ideas. This can range from something as small as using a sentence from a website without properly acknowledging the source, all the way up to turning in someone else's paper as your own. The minimum penalty is a grade of "F" on the assignment. In addition, you may fail the course, be placed on probation, or even be expelled.

Most students would never even think of turning in someone else's paper as their own. But this is not the only way plagiarism occurs. It is important to understand that plagiarism is based not just on intent but on deed. This means that it is not acceptable to say, for example, "I didn't mean to plagiarize; it just so happens that what I wrote sounds very similar to this source I read. I went to this website to get ideas for my paper, and what I read must have influenced me without me realizing it." Does that sound familiar? Well, guess what: that's still considered plagiarism, because you paraphrased someone else's ideas without citing the source.

It is very easy to avoid this problem. If you look at any source during your writing process, be aware of how influential that source may be. If you think that the source may make its way into your paper in any way, whether word-for-word or as a paraphrase of a general idea, *cite the source* using proper MLA citation format. If you don't know how to use MLA format, ask me for help (and we will go over this in class as well). That way, the worst you can be accused of is using an inappropriate source (if, for example, you used Wikipedia or a blog)—and you aren't likely to get an "F" for that, whereas you will definitely get an "F" if you don't cite the source.

The bottom line: absolutely do not consider plagiarizing any part of any assignment, in any way. It's simply not worth it. If you are having trouble writing an assignment or meeting a deadline, or if you aren't sure what might be considered plagiarism, please come and talk to me about it.

Second-to-last items

Keep this syllabus and refer to it whenever you have any questions about the class. A good half of the questions that are asked during the course of a semester have already been answered here. Do not let this document somehow fly out of your hands the second you leave the room! I will never understand how this happens, but somehow every semester it does.

At the same time, if you are ever unsure about anything related to the class, ask me about it. It is simply unacceptable to say “but I didn’t know what you meant so I couldn’t do the work.”

Related to this, *use common sense*. I can’t write everything into a syllabus, or it would be even longer than it already is. Nobody wants that. It does not say in this syllabus that you have to bring your book to class, for example, but come *on*. You gonna be in a literature class without bringing your *book*? Duh. There’s that common sense thing I told you about. The point of college isn’t for me to tell you everything you have to do. It’s for you to *figure out* what to do.

Final words

Thought it may not seem like it from this antiseptic and decidedly humorless syllabus, I am *very* excited to be working with you this semester on this course. With your help, we can make it a lot of fun!

Basic Course Schedule (*subject to change as necessary*)

Mon., Aug. 23 Introductions; syllabus
Wed., Aug. 25 Short film; discussion [R1]

UNIT 1: WHAT IS POETRY?

Mon., Aug 30 Poem set 1 [R2]
Wed., Sept. 1 Poem set 2 [R3]
Mon., Sept. 6 No class
Wed., Sept. 8 "Found poetry"; work on paper

UNIT 2: WHO WRITES POETRY?

Mon., Sept. 13 Paper #1 due; film 1 part 1
Wed., Sept. 15 Film 1 part 2; discuss [R4]
Mon., Sept. 20 Poem set 3 [R5]
Wed., Sept. 22 Poem set 4 [R6]
Mon., Sept. 27 Prepare group presentations
Wed., Sept. 29 Prepare group presentations
Mon., Oct. 4 Group presentations
Wed., Oct. 6 Group presentations
Mon., Oct 11 Work on paper

UNIT 3: HOW DO WE READ IT?

Wed., Oct. 13 Paper #2 due; film 2 part 1
Mon., Oct. 18 Film 2 part 2; discuss [R7]
Wed., Oct. 20 Poem set 5 [R8]
Mon., Oct. 25 Poem set 6 [R9]
Wed., Oct. 27 Poem set 7 [R10]
Mon., Nov. 1 Poem set 8 [R11]
Wed., Nov. 3 Work on paper

UNIT 4: WHY DO WE READ IT?

Mon., Nov. 8 Paper #3 due; film 3 part 1
Wed., Nov. 10 Film 3 part 2; discuss [R12]
Mon., Nov. 15 Poem set 9 [R13]
Wed., Nov. 17 Work on paper
Mon., Nov. 22, and Wed., Nov. 24: Thanksgiving Break
Mon., Nov. 29 Paper #4 due; prep for Poetry Fair
Wed., Dec. 1 Prep for Poetry Fair
Mon., Dec. 6 Poetry Fair
Wed., Dec. 8 Response journal due; final wrap-up

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2:45-4:45pm: Final exam

Note: The letter R with a number indicates classes for which you will need to write a response in your response journal; there are 13 total.